



Famous American Women

Grandma Moses

Anna Mary Robertson, known as “Grandma Moses” was born in Greenwich, New York on September 7, 1860. She was the third of ten children born to Russel King Robertson and Margaret Shanahan. She had a happy childhood and worked hard on the family farm. Her father would buy large sheets of blank newspaper and the children would draw. Anna would draw happy, colorful scenes. Her education was limited as she could only attend school in the summer due to the cold climate and her lack of warm clothing. At the age of twelve, Anna began earning her living as a hired girl at homes near their farm.

In 1887, Anna married a farm worker named Thomas S. Moses. They settled on a farm in Virginia. Having five children that survived, they moved to Eagle Bridge, New York where she spent the rest of her life.

It was here where she painted her first painting. The story goes that she was wallpapering and ran out of paper, so she put up white paper and painted a scene later known as the Fireboard. Her earliest work used embroidery. She embroidered pictures what were greatly admired. At the age of seventy-six, because of arthritis, she began to paint in earnest. Her early work was mostly based on scenes she found in illustrated books.

In 1938, Anna’s paintings were discovered by an art collector, Louis Caldor. In October 1939, three of these paintings were exhibited at the “Contemporary Unknown Painters” show at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. Her first individual showing was held in New York City in 1940 and she immediately became famous. By 1943 there was an overwhelming demand for her American Primitive pictures, partially because her homespun, country scenes brought about wonderful feelings and memories for many people.

She quickly became known as “Grandma Moses” by the press and the name stuck. On September 19, 1960 LIFE magazine celebrated her 100th birthday featuring her on it’s cover. New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller also proclaimed her 100th birthday

as “Grandma Moses Day” in her honor.

Her paintings were used to publicize many American holidays including Thanksgiving, Christmas and Mother’s Day. They were also reproduced on Christmas cards, tiles and fabrics in America. At the age of 100, she illustrated “Twas the Night before Christmas” by Clement Moore.



An example of Grandma Moses’ artwork called “The Pond”

